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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: NATO SIDELINE DISCUSSIONS OVERSHADOW
EU, ENERGY AGENDA AT CENTRAL EUROPEAN LEADERS SUMMIT

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Macedonia's President hosted the 15th Summit of Presidents of Central European States, May 2-3, in Ohrid. Seventeen states, spanning a geographic region from Germany to Ukraine, participated in the meeting. Kosovo is not yet a member of the group, and was not invited to participate. The official summit agenda focused on EU integration and energy security issues, but Macedonia's recent bid for NATO membership dominated sideline discussions, given the timing (on the heels of the Greek veto of Macedonia's invitation at the Bucharest NATO summit) and Greece's absence (Greece has never been a member of the group). In an undisguised signal to Athens, President Crvenkovski underscored Macedonia's strong ties with Turkey, as Turkish President Gul combined a 4-day state visit to Macedonia with his attendance at the summit as a special guest to discuss EU integration challenges. End summary.

Official Agenda: EU Integration and Energy

¶2. (U) EU integration and energy security issues dominated the official agenda of the Summit of Presidents of Central European States, which Macedonia hosted May 2-3 in Ohrid. Seventeen central and eastern European countries participated in the event. Summit conclusions (not formal resolutions or declarations) emphasized that EU integration will not be complete without the inclusion of Western Balkan states. Discussions of energy security focused on alternative solutions, including nuclear power, for ensuring long-term energy stability.

¶3. (SBU) Though the official agenda focused on EU integration and energy security issues, host President Crvenkovski, and Macedonian PM Gruevski, made it clear in their formal addresses that Greece's veto of Macedonia's NATO membership bid this April could eventually have broader consequences for the region. In his address at the summit, PM Gruevski also stated that "The policy of blockade by Greece is a blockade of EU and NATO interests as well, but it will not discourage Macedonia..."

NATO Membership Dominates Summit Sidelines

¶4. (SBU) Greece has never been a member of the Central

European States group, and in Greece's absence presidents of NATO member countries openly expressed their disappointment over the Greek veto at the Bucharest summit. They also offered expressions of support for Macedonia, according to President Crvenkovski's Chief of Staff Natasha Savova. Summit conclusions noted that summit participants unanimously agreed that Macedonia "had already fulfilled the necessary criteria for (NATO) membership." During official sessions and speeches various presidents referred to "Macedonia" rather than using the UN-agreed acronym "FYROM," in contrast to what their delegations use in other multilateral fora, including NATO and the EU.

And We Brought Friends

15. (SBU) Turkish President Gul participated in the summit as a special guest of President Crvenkovski, even though Turkey is not a member of the group. His attendance at the summit, ostensibly to discuss EU integration challenges, was complemented by a four-day official state visit to Macedonia, during which time the two countries signed a bilateral agreement on disaster relief. Though plans for the Turkish President's state visit and participation in the conference were not finalized until after Macedonia failed to receive a NATO invitation at the Bucharest summit, Savova said that other Presidents did not view Turkey's participation in the event as inappropriate.

Absent Kosovo Grabs Headlines and Summit Sidelines

16. (SBU) Macedonian press played up the Kosovar President's absence from the summit, which Crvenkovski reportedly justified by explaining that "consensus on the invitation was unattainable due to varied national positions on recognizing Kosovo." Savova indicated that press coverage of the issue was unnecessarily inflammatory, that Kosovo is not yet a member of the group, and that Pristina had not expected to be invited to the meeting. She noted that Macedonia had not joined the group until 10 years after independence. Savova reported that the President's office had met with UNMIK representatives prior to the summit; there had been agreement on both sides that Kosovo would not participate.

17. (SBU) Kosovo border demarcation also figured prominently in sideline discussions, with Serbian President Tadic calling for Serbian participation in the technical commission tasked with demarcating the Kosovo-Macedonia border. Crvenkovski responded that border demarcation is a technical, rather than political, matter, according to local press accounts.

Comment

18. (SBU) A shrewd political strategist, President Crvenkovski made the most of the timing for the Ohrid event, coming as it did on the heels of Greece's veto of Macedonia's bid to join NATO. He used the event to showcase Macedonia's strong ties with Turkey, succeeded in inserting language in the summit conclusions about Macedonia's having met NATO's membership criteria, and managed to get EU and NATO-member heads of state to refer to "Macedonia" openly instead of using the despised FYROM acronym. Though the group does not adopt binding resolutions, tough policy issues, in the form of membership decisions, could be ahead for it if Kosovo expresses interest in joining soon, since the next summit will be held in Belgrade in 2009. End Comment.

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